

Since when was consensus a pre-requisite for change? A ...

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I [noted on Friday](#) that [Economia magazine had published](#) an exchange between me and Ben Saunders about the [Fair Tax Mark](#), which is a project of which I'm a director.

The ICAEW, who publish Economia, asked me not to reproduce Ben Saunders' comments in full, and to a large degree they did you, the reader, a favour by saying so, since they reflect a strange obsession with weighting in an index on his part that only reveals how little he realises that almost any statistical work is inevitably biased by the choices made by researchers, and that this is, quite literally, unavoidable. In other words, if we changed the index as he suggests we'd simply introduce another bias and we actually chose our biases with care, despite his belief to the contrary.

More interesting though is his final paragraph, which says:

Consensus is vital to the general adoption of this sort of benchmark. So will the Fair Tax Mark campaign listen to others' views of what is fair? Will they listen to independent reviews of their methods? Or have the opinions of the few behind the campaign already decided that what they consider fair is all that matters?

The first sentence represents an extraordinary claim. From what I can tell from discussion with Saunders he is well versed in philosophy and logic. I am, I think, therefore entitled to presume he has considered the consequences of his claims, and in this case that is worrying. What he is, in effect, saying is that the Fair Tax Mark should not have been published without having sought consensus on that publication first. That gives rise to a number of questions.

Firstly, who should have been asked to agree? I guess Ben was on his own list, but who else?

Second, how were we meant to do this - before publication and therefore before anyone gave us any attention? I should however add we did actually consult a large number of organisations in advance - but not via Tolley publishing, his employer.

Third, what if someone had objected? What were we meant to do? Is the right to publish

now subject to veto of the dissenter as Saunders implies?

And it's this last point that is my main one: what Ben Saunders is saying is that unless we had consensus we should not have proceeded, but as the [Fair Tax Mark site](#) makes quite clear, it is trying to create change in the way in which tax is reported by companies. That, inevitably, means some who like the status quo will always object. And following Ben's logic that means we should not have published. And yet that is very obviously an absurd argument; it can only be used to ensure change does not happen since all change is, inevitably, based on dissent from the consensus in the first instance.

Whatever Ben has to say on methodology - and we have listened and noted with care - pales into insignificance in comparison to this much more telling observation that we should simply not have published at all without first asking his opinion. In a country where I think free speech continues to be valued highly that reveals an attitude that is at best worrying. It also explains why we take all Ben's criticisms with a little pinch of salt believing they may have an ulterior motive.

In the meantime I can advise we will be consulting widely on the next stage in the development of the Fair Tax Mark - but will not be granting anyone a veto. Because that's not the way we propose to work.